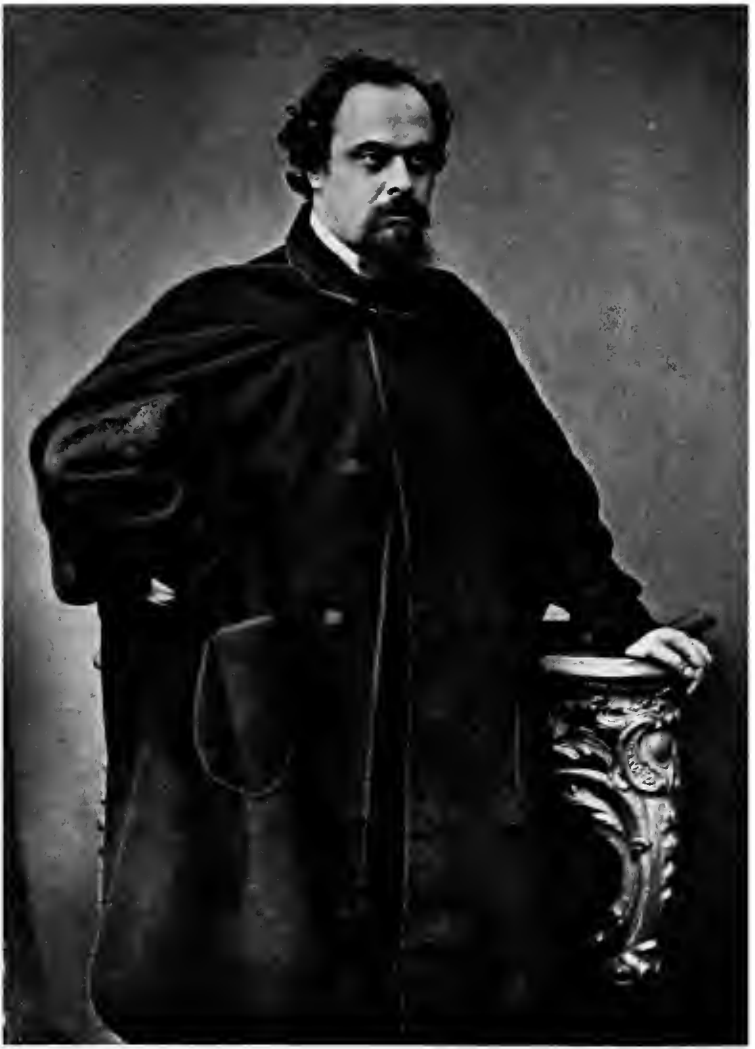

D. G. Rossetti

From a Photograph by Downey 1862

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His Work and Influence

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INCLUDING

A Brief Survey of Recent Art Tendencies

BY

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DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

IT does not fall to the lot of every epoch in art to bemoan the loss while it boasts the possession of a painter-poet. A painter in the degree of his greatness is of course somewhat the poet, but not with the emphasis of metre and rhyme, not with the local fervour that requires and finds special speech in what would seem to be poetry's special domain. In this dual and yet separate sense was Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the Painter and Poet.

His beginnings take us back to the many off-shoots from the revival of Poetry indicated by Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Byron. It is not within the present purpose to indicate all those off-shoots, each with its peculiarity of branch and leaf, but it is within it to indicate some of the off-shoots represented by Rossetti. But before considering his work, let us endeavour to conjure a, so to speak, impersonal personality of the man. Let us know the medium through which influences were to pass and be influenced. First and foremost, then, Rossetti was not British. Whether he was born in England, or whether he visited or did not visit Italy, matters little. His nature was a transplantation, not

merely from Italy, but from Mediæval Italy. He breathed time with the pulse of perhaps the most cosmopolitan city in the world, but he lived centuries away. He was a surviving plenipotentiary of early Italian feeling presenting credentials to British Common Sense; a pilgrim who had got out of the region of shrines, but who at every cross-like thing knelt down by the force of his habit of thought and muscle. He was with us, but not of us. Without effort, almost without consciousness, we associate him with Madonnas, illumined manuscripts, altar-pieces, and cloisters where work was done not so much for earth as for heaven, where there were no such drums and trumpets as newspapers and journals, where

art was so much nature that it was praise and prayer, uninfluenced by private opinion made public, by the coins of a realm, a ribbon of honour, or the initials of an Academy however Royal—an example surely in the fortified *manner* of his purpose and work which many of us might follow with personal and public advantage. His devotion to his art, his abnegation, his patient waiting for that tide which did not seem to have a flood, and his endurance of what after all was but a local reputation —his whole work in short was a vitalised reproach to much of the paragraph literature and art abroad, and he had, must have had, a greatness of soul worthy the grove which harboured the much-enduring Carlyle and the faintless George Eliot.

Now the painter, by the very nature of his work and its limitations, can only give single aspects of thoughts and emotions; but he has the uncommon advantage of complete grasp at a glance, one sweep of the eye across his canvas bringing the artist's emotion in full rounded intensity upon our emotion. On the other hand, the poet may start with the disadvantage of slow, line-by-line growth, but he has the advantage at the finish of accumulated developments. He can play pranks with the imagination, trick it into activity, and at last complete its peregrinations by a colon. Rossetti's nature no doubt felt that, great though his power of speech in colour and form was, his very love of emotional detail

made that speech seem to him at times inadequate. Instead of trying, like Hogarth and Frith, to portray on canvas a plural aspect of life by a series of single aspects, and thus make the painter trespass on the territory of the novelist, he went direct to the means used by Dante and Shakspere. It would have taken miles of canvas to have brought home to us

'Lazy, laughing, languid Jenny,'

as his vivid and pathetic poem does, and many a line in his ballads and sonnets would be subject enough for a year or so of a painter's life.

To ask Which was Rossetti the greater as—Poet or Painter? seems about as reasonable as asking if the world can

better afford to do without this poet or that one, this great play or that great picture—especially when the world does not make choice absolutely necessary by thrusting its closed hands before us and repeating the nursery decree of 'Handy pandy,' etc. To be without either of the greatnesses, having once had both, would be loss, and this loss or gain cannot be gauged by secret or open voting, by the preponderance of numerals for or against this picture or that poem. In art the majority cannot really overrule the minority, the minority being able to foster their partialities until they become impartial only in death. In the morning we might decide for Rossetti the Painter, and in the evening meet a solitary soul to whom a

sonnet, ballad, or even a couplet of Rossetti the Poet is the open sesame to that soul's heart. Each can go on his way rejoicing in the kind of his possession, rejoicing the more if in his nature he can find a place for the duality of the remarkable man who has gone and left us a record of his nights and days.

The works of Rossetti, the Artist, are like a pomegranate—a simile suggested by his 'Prosperina,' who holds this 'drear dire fruit' in her hand. It is suggestive of his colour, compactness, subtlety, his rounded unity—it also, it must be owned, suggests that sameness with a difference which haunts his works. 'Prosperina,' for example, is related to 'Fiammetta' as

one pomegranate's pippin is related to another.

A subdued southern warmth pervades some of his pictures. They are like a deep sunset seen afar through a lacery of wood, or a sun-illumined glass window caught in its highest warmth and transfixed in a frame to give glory to a sun-impervious wall. Others seem to have an immortality of veiled glow around, about, and through them, as though even human vision must dim before they will. There is an apparent reserve fund of power that will keep pace with decay itself, and stand warm when all else is paling to invisibility. Rossetti's is not the glow, say of Rubens. It has more refinement, more subtlety. There is more

economy in effect, more frugality of purpose; taste is provoked, and leaves desire on the palate. The journey from our art-cultured nature (and it requires to be this) to Rossetti's art is one that never seems complete, one that we would traverse time after time and turn back to traverse again and again. These journeys are like the stolen peeps at a beautiful face—each peep to be the last, and yet the preface to more. They are like the central point of a Greek frieze, with neither beginning nor end, and leave us wondering. Though the richness is full enough to be rich, it holds back just where our own senses and imagination can have opportunity to play, and between the imagination of the artist and our own, we are lured on and on to an infinity of some-

thing between pleasure and pain which defies analysis. Rossetti, it has been said time after time, was a supreme colourist, and in this too we can discern the Italian feeling probing its way through centuries and countries to his exiled nature in England. His colours are not exactly the colours we see in these hardy Isles under our fickle atmosphere and sky, but a cross between Italian Tradition and English Fact, in unity with his general sentiment, manner, and treatment. This mingling of the new and old, of the home and foreign influence (with a partiality for the old and foreign) would form no doubt for many people an impeding mysticism; and yet to other and more kindred natures this very mingling would be its indefinable charm—

a charm all the more keen when they had grown to understand it. Probably the pleasure which many of his worshippers experience in his work is only half of something they actually know, the other half being concealed, like the rose in its bud, within the possibility of their natures, and which they feel in a far-off mystic way not definite enough to be worded.

This latter, the foreign, the Italian half of the charm, is a touch of that cosmopolitan spirit within us all, and which, in defiance of localisms of nature, development and culture, makes humanity one. The charm of most of Rossetti's work indeed is somewhat akin to that beauty in the Greek form, which even natures ignorant of the source and the why and the wherefore, in

various ways acknowledge *is* beautiful. As with colour, so with subject. His creations are removed from us, but not so far removed as to get outside humanity altogether, for if Rossetti wanted to paint a 'Blessed Damozel' he had after all to paint a woman, and that is a symbolism humanity has a singular aptitude to understand. On that simple basis of woman, Maoris and Zulus would be able to comprehend the language of one who, on higher grounds of interpretation in his own country, has not yet been much or widely understood. True it is Rossetti did not give the people an opportunity to even try to understand him. He nursed his babe of remoteness until it became a child which most people would

now go to see for its peculiarity of limb or complexion; and having been kept from it so long, having had their fancies kindled by imitators and falsifying satirists, they would perhaps view the art-phenomenon with disappointment, expecting to see artistic compound fractures and contortions. However, seeing that Rossetti (like all other artists of whom we have any record) if he wanted to pictorially say 'woman' or 'man' had to paint a woman or man, to that extent, to the extent of a recognition of their own species and of the beautiful in general, the people would comprehend him; but hardly with an enthusiasm kindling feelings approaching affection, because his art is not of the realistic flesh-

and-blood-kitchen-utensil order. His creations have little connection with the mother's nipple, with the warm faithful social love that keeps the planet together. There is no sign of palpitation and pulse; no electricity flashes facts of life from continent to continent in *their* spheres; no engined caravans skim the landscape with a shriek, carrying souls from city to city; no machine, with its whir of straps and wheels, thuds the walls of their habitation —the characters are abstractions, dreams, musings, lethargic spirits coming to the borderland of matter and keeping aloof from it in spiritual pride; they are not so much what are, as what have been, with the survival of their human natures concentrated in their ruddy flatly-fulsome

lips—lips so specialised in the female characters as to become an indication if there were no other facial indications of sex. But there is another barrier besides mysticism between this artist and the public. His ultimate sum-total of female or indeed of male beauty is not, from a public stand-point, very sympathetic. Familiarity, they say, breeds contempt, but contrary to this, Rossetti's resurrection beauty may require from many people a familiarity ere they can behold it without breeding contempt of a gentler kind, for there are still many who cannot view the work of the school in which Rossetti was the first head-master, without ill-temper culminating in that superior ridicule of the half-ignorant, who use 'rot'

and 'bosh' as colons to their periods of expletives. His type of beauty, his source of thought and emotion, his mode of expressing them are not their types, their sources, and their modes; and of course the half-learned Daniels who come to judgment think the traditions of their own biased natures the only reliable ones. There is this touch of bias even in the daily-bread subject of print butter. We find creatures who look with suspicion upon a new pattern. They would not relish the product of their own dairy, even the product of their own favourite cow, if the new grass butter had not the mould of their own familiar 'pat.' Others cannot, or believe they cannot, walk home except through certain custom-

prescribed streets, yea, and on a certain side even of those streets. If we touch a post or a rail with our swinging hand this morning the sun of to-morrow will probably see us touch it again. Such is the tendency of each nature towards itself—shutting out other natures until either slow revealings or sudden Saul-like conversions let in light. Many there must be to whom Rossetti's light is something to exasperate their darkness, and something can be urged on their side of course. If an artist or poet lives in a remote Italian period when he breathes in the English nineteenth century; if he glances back whilst others are looking about and before them; if he poises above dim memories trying to vivify

them whilst the people, his audience, grapple hand and brain with tangible and very realistic facts—the artist or poet must not complain of neglect, or feel, with too much pride, their ignorance. His dreamings would not keep the life in those who, by their necessary devotion to the world, make his dreaming at all possible, for even your divine poet and painter would soon collapse without his daily supply of wheat.

Rossetti's subjects and their treatment then, it must be admitted, are foreign to common sympathies, his type of beauty is rather eccentric, and his manner undeniably mannered. His is not so much the beauty of Nature, or of Art in the abstract, as the beauty of *an* art—a craft

self-specialised by his conceptions and executions. This artist always seems to have been conscious of *doing* this specialised art. We see very little of the man carried away by and in his subject, bringing it to a fervent issue by any means within reach, but we see the artist coolly selecting his deliberations, painting them in, painting them out, making one conception the tomb of another, and giving the world what infinite consciousness gave him. So it comes about that the delight in Rossetti's pictures is more delicately æsthetic (to use a distorted and burlesqued word) than vigorously emotional; more the result of an affectation than an approach to nature, and requiring a glossary of almost obsolete cul-

ture so as to surround it with comprehension before it can be presented with any entirety to the heart. The artistic or emotional appeal is thus not direct, but through avenues of what the majority of people regard as so much superfluous training, and that appeal to the extent of the indifference or ignorance of these people is therefore impeded. To persons whose lives are more practical than symbolical his symbolism would be oppressive. A flower (or rather the phantom of a flower, for even this bit of nature with Rossetti is dreamy) is sometimes introduced on his canvas or even on the frame of his picture. To the initiated this flower speaks parables; to the ignorant (the many) it is an obtrusive enigma perpetually saying

'Guess!' With him a shell is not a shell only, or a bird a bird; they are hieroglyphics which even some of his admirers cannot interpret. They accept the signs in faith, and worship accordingly. His pictures not only require titles but foot-notes, and recognising this fact the artist has more than once called upon himself as the poet for an explanatory sonnet, which too in its turn requires certain mental annotation before it can be understood, and even then with a distant grey indefiniteness. Is not this old-time symbolism a weakness in the speech of the artist? It may be in unity with the period he affected, but regarding his work as a communication between man and man is not the symbolism an outside aid which the weak rather

than the strong in speech would be likely to employ? While it has the aspect of learning, it also hints at least a want of expressional power. (His symbols are really made to express what the character in his picture by its simple existence ought to express.)

By giving Love or Death or Memory a separate expression in a plant, flower, or a bird, he converts the character (the very core of his subject) into a superior lay figure elaborately labelled with its attributes. If the character representing an emotion does not tell that emotion without the aid of a symbol, which really becomes a pictorial ticket, has not the artist failed in the higher eloquence of art? It would seem so, and if one artist can fully depict

an unmistakable emotion, and another only half depict it, with the other half in a symbolical accessory, which artist touches the higher range of pictorial speech? Surely there can be little doubt. Rossetti's poems can speak without his pictures, but very few of his pictures can definitely speak without his or somebody else's poems. In his poems he may be as vividly imaginative as Coleridge, but in his pictures he is as recondítely fanciful as early tapestry.

Wonderful in colour and harmony, beautiful in a peculiarly artificial or hothouse beauty though the works be, they lack readable *expression.* They do not so much depict *a* feeling or *a* thought as Feeling or Thought, and of course those

within his temple may say 'Lo! an achievement worthy our Priest. Your painter gives us commonplace definiteness, but our *Artist*—ah, he is as vague as feeling in music, allowing each heart to interpret as it may.'

For whatever reason Rossetti did not exhibit his pictures, the very fact that he did not, and that he held himself aloof from Society, provoked the interest of wonderment. People most like to see that from which they are most prohibited, and mystery only intensifies the desire. Rossetti was mysterious simply because amid notoriety-hunting people, he who could command more than mere notoriety declined it apparently not even with thanks. It is said that the missing

part of a newspaper will concern a woman more than any other part, and so the unexhibited pictures of a (to them) mysteriously retiring artist have come to concern those who seek the paragraph chit-chat of journals, and so help to blow that bubble of people's lips called 'fame.' In the present case the artist happened to be the most influential of the much-talked-of Brotherhood which in due course won the enthusiasm of John Ruskin, who stood by or for them because their keynote of moral sincerity struck a chord in his easily vibrated nature. The artist also happened to be an actually scribing poetical poet, and could suggest interest in the labours of his brush through the point of his pen. He also happened in time to have, as a result

of his greatness, an inner circle of worshipping and influential friends who could at odd moments whet the public appetite for some unforthcoming work of their caged genius. He likewise had an outer circle of admirers who spoke of him and his work in superlatives, or pantomimed inexpressibles of admiration. He was a character, passed a singular life, had a house in Cheyne Walk, and so rubbed brick-and-mortar shoulders with Carlyle and George Eliot. Tales were told (as tales *are* told) of him and his seclusive personality, and even the name of royalty was embroidered about the border of his eccentricity. True or untrue, these winkings and noddings, these outside sputterings sputtered by ungreat people to

assume greatness; these buzzings of flies about the eyelashes of the basking cow, became *belief*, and therefore became a hypothetical Rossetti if not the real one. Thus there grew about Rossetti's *name* the halo of mystery. It came to be understood by those near the outer circles, and then by others outside these again, that he was a retiring power in the world, influencing (in what very few knew, though the many believed) influencing more than those who declared themselves in academies and galleries. It is said he was a brilliant talker, influential, his personality infusing, and those about consciously or unconsciously caught and conveyed it in things they said and wrote. His pictures were not only purchased and made household

specialities of, but ladies have wrought his singular circular initials into the centre of antimacassars, and other similar things. Even the central ornamentation of a brass fire-grate is a perforated 'D.G.R.', to bear witness to the deep admiration of the man whose pictures looked out from the walls of almost every room of the same house. A man who could excite this practical kind of admiration was assuredly not of the commonplace order, and this antimacassar ritual of worship indicates to those who are outside either the inner or outer circles, the actuality of his permeating influence. Perhaps, like Coleridge, he influenced others to do far more in actual bulk than he did himself, much though that was. His cast-off hints were pro-

bably taken up and made into apparently new garments—canvases with new names, books with new bindings and titles.

Probably none of the artists who formed the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were surprised at its incoherence. It may have been, indeed was, something more than the love of a mere name, such as Coleridge's love of the name Susquehanna, around which he perhaps formed ideals that the possibilities of life have not yet revealed. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was something more than a name, but it was certainly not more logical than the formation of Social Arcadias such as even Coleridge, Emerson, and Hawthorne contemplated—social arcadias that would continue in everlasting righteous unity, and do

away with the moral necessity of a future heaven to balance the immoral exigencies of the present earth. The artistic varieties that have since sprung from those who formed the Brotherhood show the heterogeneous materials they were trying to work into the one pattern. If it be said in extenuation of the desertions, 'But see how this artist or that one deviated,' the reply is that human nature has a trick of deviating, and of leaving first principles behind. Human nature during all the bygone ages of mutation has perhaps lost the power to be alphabetically faithful to them, or men, being heteroptical, see first principles differently, and as each will think of each, falsely. The Brotherhood, or rather the Cousinhood,

for the relationship became somewhat distant, has done wonderful, if in some cases eccentric, things. It made artists pause. They hesitated and considered. Before committing themselves and the world to any more variegated canvas, they asked, with various degrees of personal seriousness, 'Have we anything worth committing, and if so, in what manner, on what principle?' Instead of spawning prematurely, they abided their time, and nursed their offspring with something like affection. Instead of painting yards of canvas, as though the whole planet were to be converted into a diorama for all the suns, moons, and stars to gaze upon, they practically remembered that wall-space was limited, that

every obtainable pot of paint was not to be picturised, and that art was something more than a habit which became every man, time, place, and thing. There was an economical silence observed until they had something to say, which something they said with all the more learning because of the silence. We are told that the Brotherhood was formed, that the pause was made to inculcate their fundamental principle of Direct Study from Nature herself, unfettered by the conventionalities of the antique and the academies. We are to understand from the *Germ* that they also avowed a Moral Purpose. These intentions contrasted with actual results are difficult to understand. Here are two statements, and

there appear to be two contradictions. (1) The men who are said to have most obstinately clung to that fundamental principle (of direct study from nature) apparently discarded nature, and wove themselves within a second-nature of Art. Few men show the *presence* of Art more emphatically than the men who have followed in the track of the school. They appear, at least, to work with the belief that Art, *as* Art, should declare itself, make itself manifest, and mark a distinct line between itself and nature. Instead of pursuing direct study from nature, present nature, human and otherwise, until the object pursued, caught, and reproduced aggravates the beholder with ecstatic recognition, they pursue a nature

so far removed from most people that it is *not* a nature but an artificial assumption on the tip of the imagination, going far away into a period, climate, and manner which cannot be re-lived, though followers do put on mockeries of its garments and read the alliterations of pet poets. This is the general impression of people who grip 1882 with their right hand, and endeavour to reach back to the (to them) indefinite asceticisms in the (to them) undatable past. (2) The men who started out with moral motives have nurtured *Art*, and have let the moralities take care of themselves. The Brotherhood Boat in fact swamped because the timbers parted, each Brother clutching hold of a floatable bit—Rossetti apparently taking

possession of the rudder. These men in fact had first to learn to talk before they could preach. They were like a caterpillar that might conceive the idea of being a butterfly without first undergoing the natural imprisonment of a chrysalis.

But now that the Butterfly has come there are many to whom it assumes some of the beauties, but particularly some of the grotesquenesses of the dragon-fly. It is strange, out of the ken of their every-day ordinary field-fly observation, and all the more embarrassing because of its transformations, for there are nice distinctions between Rossetti and Mr. Burne-Jones. The latter will now probably lead where the former left off, bearing little or no allegiance to the

original codes, and following on that course of his which has both confounded and gratified. He, too, has been strange, hieroglyphical to the majority. Gratified though they have been with *something*, they have only been taken into partial confidence, and the artist, busy with his fancy, has left them floundering with their facts. What, may now be asked, is the secret of the strangeness of the new head Master? That secret is concealed, it may be suggested, in the casket of his motive. Given the key to that and the mystery seems plain even to ordinary eyes; but not given it, the blindfolded mind, biased in other and more commonplace directions, may wander about within its wondering, and never find a loophole through

which to leap and discern what to it seemeth the chief thing—namely, common sense. The motive would now seem to be the old Greek one and that of the German ascetics—the pursuit of the beautiful; but the result of that motive, the ridiculed eccentricity of the school, is very much due to the source from which that beauty has been got. There is beauty and beauty (it needs no ghost, etc.), and the wandering unapostolic apostle of Pre-Raphaelite codes has fallen upon a beauty so old that it is new to the minds which look no farther than a circumference of inches around them. Paint a glass, or a kettle, or a flower, or a cow, or a shell so vividly that a child might think it could lift, smell

or drive; paint an English landscape or sea-scape so naturally that the beholder could walk i' the sun there or feel the breeze from the fresh waves, and there is some sort of understood satisfaction for that class of people who buy catalogues to know the titles of even these every-day things. These creatures are not wholly satisfied to see before them a nameless transcript from the realm of nature. They want to know the place, the spot, and all the more satisfaction is there if they can say 'See! the very stile we sat on at Hastings; the very path near the chine at Shanklin; the very, yes, the very same cliff at Scarborough, as real as life. And oh, see the donkeys!'

Give, instead of these, an illustration to a line from Morris or Swinburne (very much talked of but very little read by these people), in which some far-off, long-since-buried, and for-evermore-impossible creatures have pictorial resurrection; clad in really beautiful garbs; standing, sitting, or poising in dreamily graceful attitudes; playing instruments not heard by modern ears; awaiting the approach of imagined knight or knights seen through the lacery of a doorway or window; maidens looking listless and lethargic; gazing, but apparently seeing nothing, like a girl's eyes open ere the brain is awake; breathing, but with the imperceptible breath of a trance; smiling (when—oh epoch!—they do) the smile of the

smileless; and altogether living the life one would expect to find in the heaven-most region of purgatory—given an illustration such as this to an unfamiliar and naturally foreign subject, and your home-kettle-recognising connoisseurs smile and show their dog-tooth, sneer the unwordable wisdom of *their* experience of life and art, pass on to the next land-scape, sea-scape, or sunset, and on the following Wednesday learnedly enjoy one of Mr. Du Maurier's cartoons; make a humorous observation about the next imitation sunflower; see 'Patience' (or rather half see it, for they cannot grasp its double drift), and conclude that they have conclusively solved the riddle—yea though they cannot see that their own

walls are the more beautiful, their daughters more elegant for the movement of which this pictorial mysticism is only a part. They cannot see that in this offshoot from the Pre-Raphaelite body there is an earnest desire to seize and nurture beauty. Not the robust yet serene beauty of the Greeks or the flesh-and-blood beauty of the English, but beauty nevertheless, and the period is gradually growing to see that it is so.

This beauty has its weakness and even its eccentricities. It has these, because ideal, poetical, abstract though it be, it bears the impress of its ascetic source, and the impress of the physical frailties and the artistic childhood of the artists. To speak without confounding modesty

(and after all a man's system—his brain, heart, liver, nerves—is the artist), this new beauty, signalised in the first instance perhaps by Rossetti, has the impress of hypochondriacal natures expressing themselves in paint-and-brush soliloquies. There may be more healthy natures at the same work, but they assume hypochondriacy if they have it not. Much in the same way, healthy holiday people visit Matlock. They become so seasoned to bath-chairs and crutches that they take to vehicles and sticks, and think tenderly of themselves. On the other hand, when we walk behind a dragoon guard we almost unconsciously fit our shoulders to his back.

While the works of these imitated men

are beautiful in a more subtle sense than we have been accustomed to, they are to those who can see beyond the brush and paint, the expression of poetical, one-sided, physically-tender natures. If these natures had been turned to the world's work to forge iron instead of painting pictures, they would have been distinguished at intricate wrought-iron tracery rather than at roof-supporting girders; if masonry, at the capitals rather than the columns; if wood-work, rather at pedestal and bracket carving than at joists and beams; and if there were no severe masters about they would forge the iron, cut the stone, and carve the wood, not for any common utilitarian purpose but for the beautiful result of the forging,

cutting, and carving alone. Some observers have professed to see in Rossetti's and Mr. Burne-Jones's pictures an embodiment of the world-weariness, and an expression of the fag-end of the lusts of the flesh of this period; but whatever there may be in their work answering to this theory, it is probably related only in the resemblance.

These men then have stepped out of the home demands, and have not even gone to what has been regarded as the head-centre of beauty—Greece—but they have propelled their own pale cast of thought into the asceticism of Italy, mingled them both, and brought forth a new variation. As the sonnet was (let it be supposed) imported into England by

Sir Thomas Wyatt, and naturalised by Spenser and Shakspere with the result of varied treatments of the same form, so Rossetti and those who have followed and are following with various degrees of independence, are naturalising the mediæval spirit of beauty, running the old form through another variety of detail. So it comes that even if these men give us a Venus, a Psyche, a Hamlet, or an Ophelia, they ignore the traditions of form we have been accustomed to, and go to another tradition of form and give us a Venus, a Psyche, a Hamlet, and an Ophelia with the shadows of the cloisters on their pale faces. Mr. Burne-Jones may insist that he has the same right to go to Italy for his form and feeling as Sir Frederick

Leighton has to go to Greece for his. So he has. He could go to the Boers, or Zulus, or Esquimaux with perfect indisputable right if his sense of beauty dictated it, but in the end it all resolves itself into this—Which form expresses or reflexes the ultimate *majority* of humanity? With art as with pigeons, monkeys, and flowers, the fittest, the strongest, will survive, and if in centuries hence the men and women respond as faithfully to us as we feel that we respond to the men and women of Homer and Shakspere, there is evidently a very precarious life for the shadowy revivals of mediæval beauty—unless, indeed, the physical decay of humanity sets in, and men grow to express themselves and to see themselves expressed in the

pictorial language or delineation of that decay. If this be so, if nervous, hypochondriacal, moody natures in time become the predominating type of creature inhabiting the globe whose gradual dying they portend, if there are no arctic explorations, no steam hammers, no heroic dealings with land and sea, no enthusiasm in the world as it then is, but a dreamy interest in what was and what is to be; if but frail progenies then come forth from human love, and there are no resources to keep men's shoulders square, their lungs full, and their hearts firm in beat—if this should come to pass, art will bear the impress of it, and the Anglo-Italian feeling will prevail over the more vigorous Anglo-Greek. If this

should *not* be (and we will credit the world with an American, Indian, African, and Australian source or two yet), What, may be asked, is likely to be the result of this movement in art and literature which has been growing for the past twenty years, and has now almost become of age? The movement, ridiculed though it has been, is undoubtedly one of those zig-zag angular movements by which a cart mounts a hill, or a vessel tricks an unfavourable wind into its favour. There is no avoiding this stage of advance as though the advance had not been attained by it. The movement has become too much of our daily life even to the extent of furnishing the stage, papering our walls, carpeting our floors,

shaping and colouring our dresses, chairs, cups and saucers, and fire-irons. This aim for an eccentric kind of beauty along with the more ordinary aims of others, has drawn attention to *all* beauty, so that decorations from the Japanese and around by India and Greece are now household influences. Let us concentrate, however, upon the current school of Art that makes beauty and imagination its main pursuit, and which seems to have had its fountainhead in Rossetti. The advance movement on the highroad of art taken by this school is undoubtedly in colour and detail. The Greeks nurtured form to the neglect of colour, perhaps because, as it is said, they had not a corresponding perception of it. The new modern school

nurtures colour to the neglect of form, perhaps because it has not a corresponding grasp of it. More subtle, delicate, indeed almost new harmonies have been woven and interwoven by the Pre-Raphaelites. Pictorial art has approached nearer music than ever. We can see the relationship between the harmony of the one and the harmony of the other, see the discords, and indeed discern in some of the advanced pictures points of colour corresponding to tones and semi-tones. Mr. Whistler with his Nocturnes, Symphonies, and Studies has worked upon a Truth in art, but with too much emphasis. He has made that which should be secondary, primary. He has gathered the composition that should have been distributed

over a picture into a point—ignoring picture and specialising paint. Nevertheless there is truth in his experiments; and those experiments are an epitome of the tendency of this age towards a higher perception of colour. As the bee, the highest of insects, selects for its honey the most advanced colour in flowers (blue); so we, the highest of animals, have a like perception for the advance in the beauty of colour in art and nature.

The Pre-Raphaelites and their followers have done much for the colour sense, but certainly not all. The advance of general pictorial art has contributed its share of influence in the same way as the general movement of the sea helps to give impetus to the one breaker

which mounts and gives new glory to the cliffs. This keener appreciation of colour, however, is seen in other arts, and it is difficult, if at all possible, to strictly define where influence and counter-influence begin and end. For example, we have colour predominating over form in the advanced school of music. Wagner has imparted new beauties of harmony and colour more subtle than the old. He has caught the abstract beauty of passion and the universe, and depicted it in elaborate musical colour and detail. Haydn and Mozart painted us pastorals akin to the landscape movement in the painter's art, but first Beethoven and then Wagner soared away from the localism of the

pastoral, poised above the land, sea, and humanity, and gave us the abstract of a world's beauty and passion with such subtle musico-colour as finds relationship in the colour of the Pre-Raphaelites. Like the Pre-Raphaelites, Wagner is also deficient in grasp of form. The marked tendency of the stage in recent years has been and still is towards special artistic effect, the Lyceum being another Grosvenor gallery, and Mr. Henry Irving another Mr. Burne-Jones. Mr. Irving is in every respect a Pre-Raphaelite (using this word in its ill-used sense), and it is surprising how near Mr. Rossetti in one of his pictures has approached in outward form, manner, and feeling, the great actor's picture of Hamlet. Mr.

Irving loves to detailise Shakspere's text. He loves to have it archæologically illustrated on the stage—every garb true, every scene as beautiful as advanced upholstery can make it; and yet (even his warmest supporters will surely admit it), like the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite studios, like Wagner, like Whistler in his colour studies, Mr. Irving is crude in grasping the beauty of form.

To see the relationship still more vividly we have only to note how related Mr. Irving's detailed art is to the old-style tragic actor's solid and firm elocutionary form, and how there is a parallel contrast between Mr. Burne-Jones's work, and that of the conventionally classic school. Even Mr.

Swinburne, brilliant though he is in form, is often overcome by his musical and pictorial colour, and revels in it, apparently for its own sake. Mr. William Morris has too keen a sense of symmetry and unity to neglect or encroach upon form with colour or to be even weak in form itself, and this is borne out by the beautiful roundness, the clear gentle growth and completeness of his stories; still Mr. Morris joins the general tendency of this period, and is a colourist, but of an exquisitely delicate and sensitive order, as though to him colour *is* form; or, to use a simile, as though colour is the conscience of form; or yet another, as though colour is emotion, and form thought.

The influences indicated may not much increase at their source, but what already exists will spread and infuse imagination, fancy, ideality—in short, poetry, where hitherto it has been absent, and whilst the good results will prevail, the affected fopperies of fraudulent imitators must pass away, having, in their negative fashion, drawn attention to the reality which they themselves but caricatured.

Much could be said upon Rossetti's poems, but the designed limit of this survey will not admit of their consideration here.

Rossetti's devotion (this of him is an apt term) to art has probably been unexampled in modern times, and it almost

amounted to a bigoted obstinacy of secular faith. Living as he did a life of pains and penalties, and dying with the gathering music of praise about his ears, there was surely pathos in that early end which came irrevocably sure and slow. We would have had him patriarchal with the chants of continents to sooth the inevitably waning days. Remembering his devotion and labour we would have had—but it was *not* so and could not be, for nature and death have no etiquette conformable with fame's vanity. Rossetti went to the sea to submit his deferred obedience to nature, but it sufficed not. He went to the open to breathe its air, but the air like a breath inhaled his life away.

Born in London in May 1828, Dante Gabriel Rossetti died at Birchington-on-Sea, Kent, on the 9th of April 1882, and was buried at the Parish Church, Birchington.